Archaeological Series No. 54

A MONOGRAPH ON SOMAPALEM TEMPLES

(Chittoor District)

By

N. S. Ramaswamy

General Editor

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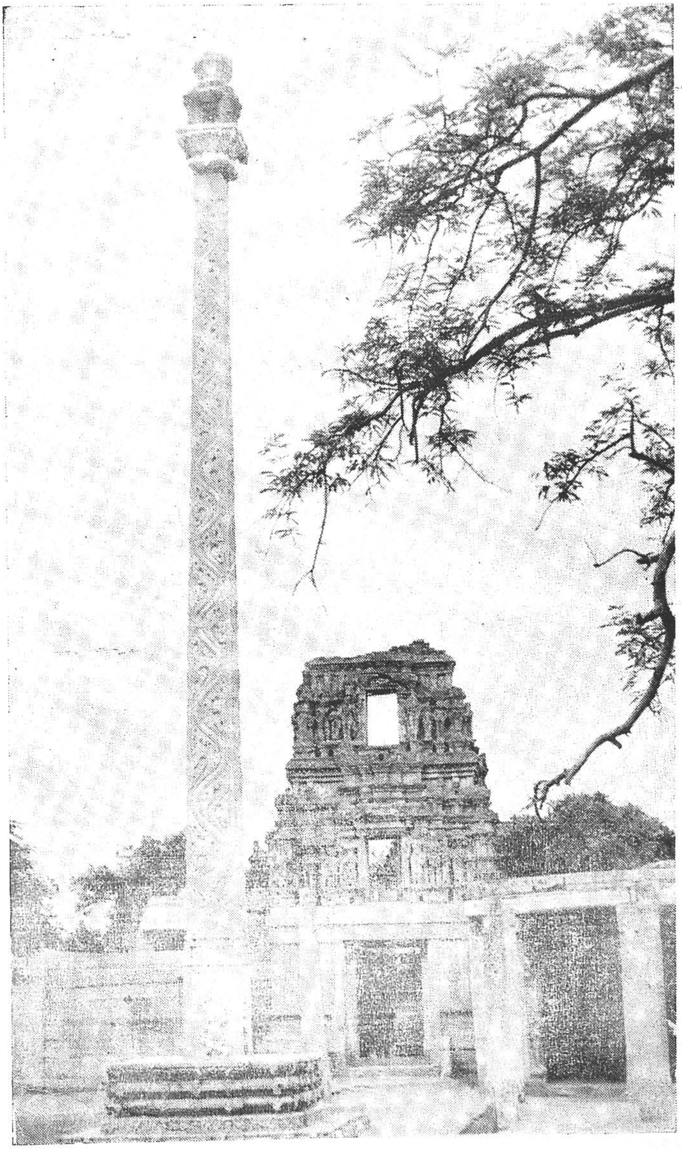

Temple view showing Dhvajastambha & Shepherds' Mandapa

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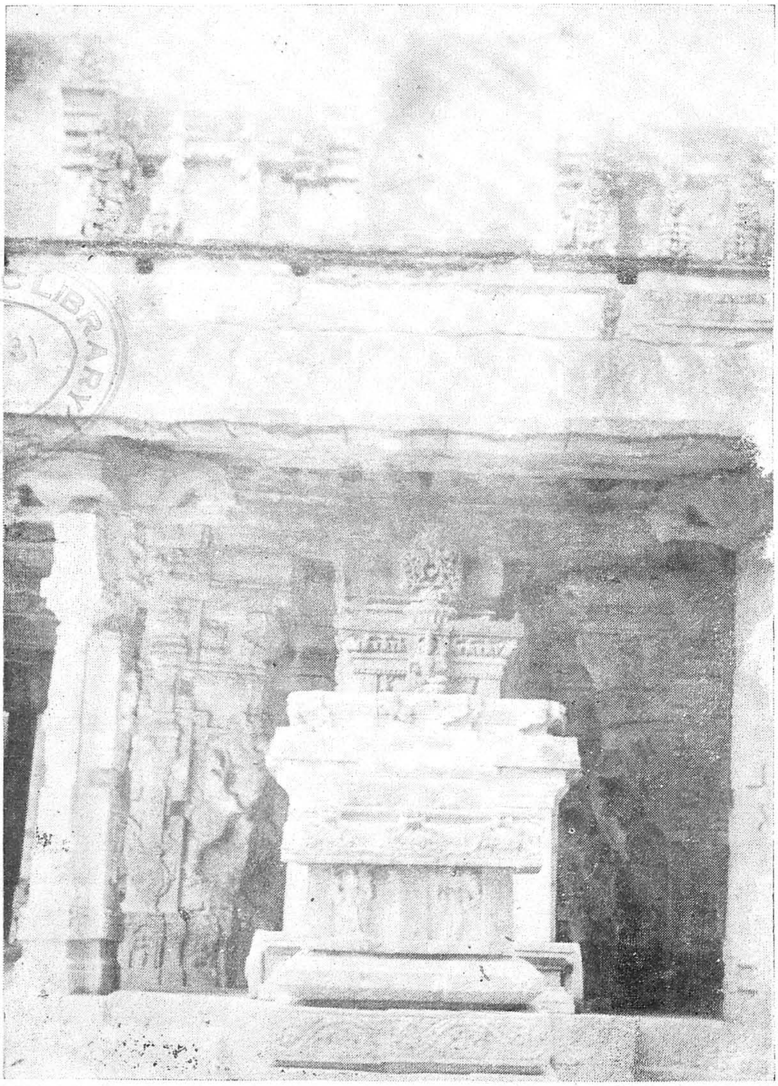
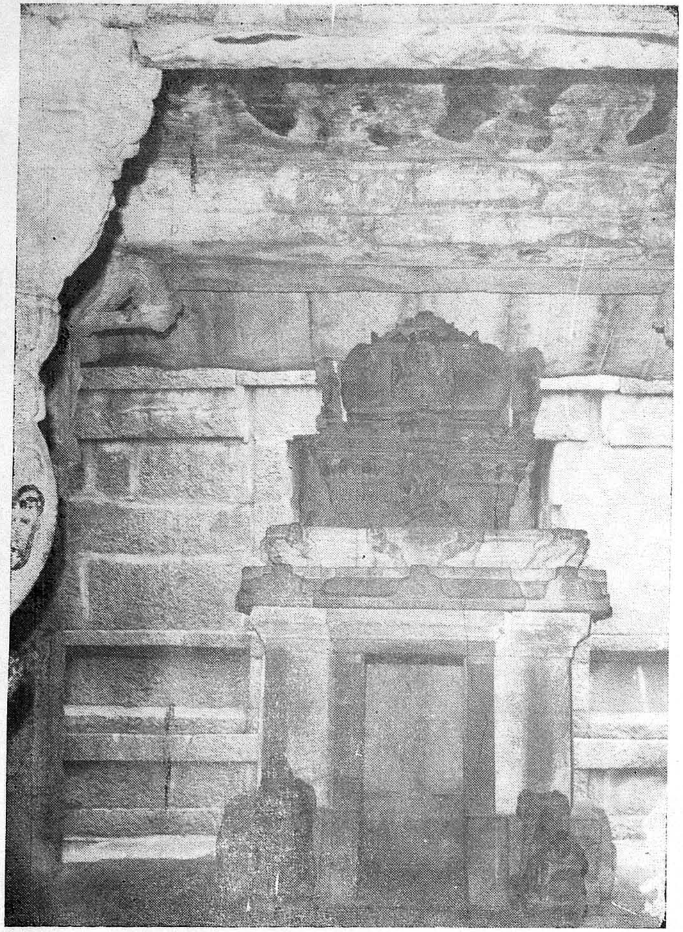
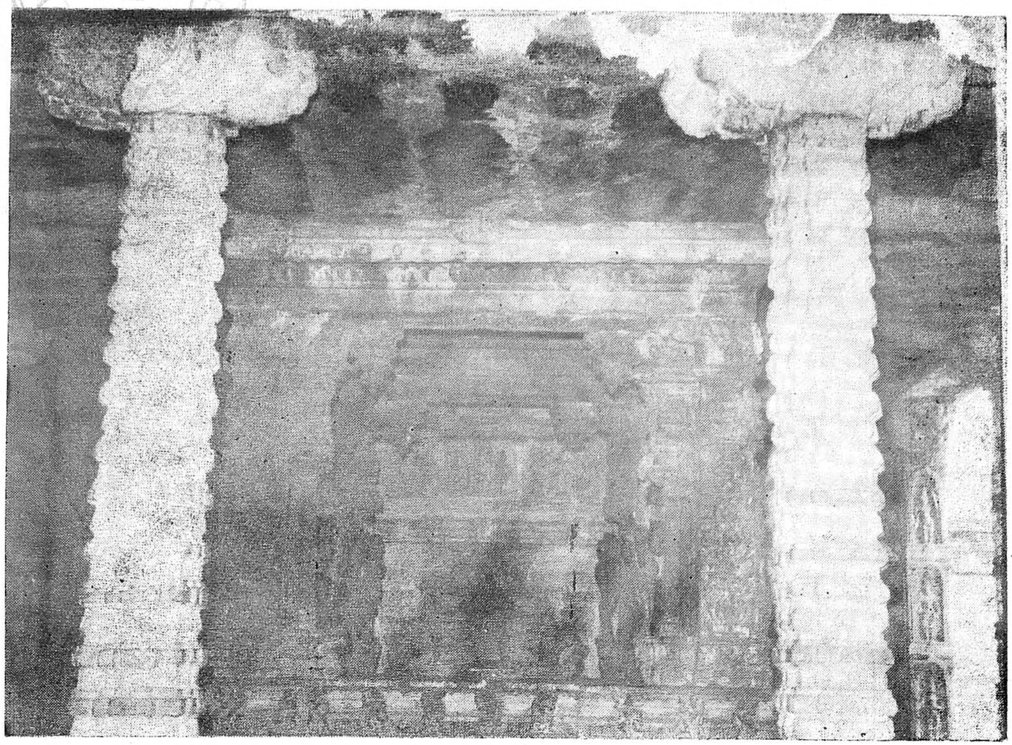


Front view of the Mahamandapa with miniature stone chariot

View of the brick 'hara' of the miniature shrine on the edge of the Mahamandapa roof

A view of Mahamandapa roof shrines


Stone chariot as seen from Mahamandapa


Kalyana Mandapa and its Pavilion

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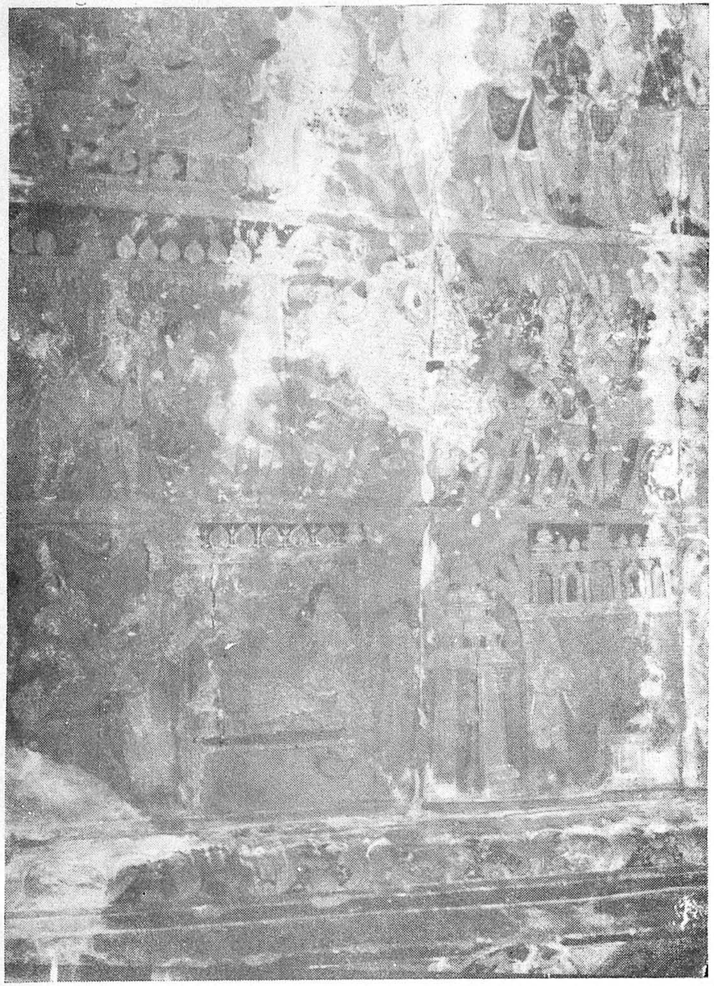
Remains of the mural on the ceiling of Mahamandapa - badly damaged



Painted scenes to the right of the temple- badly- damaged

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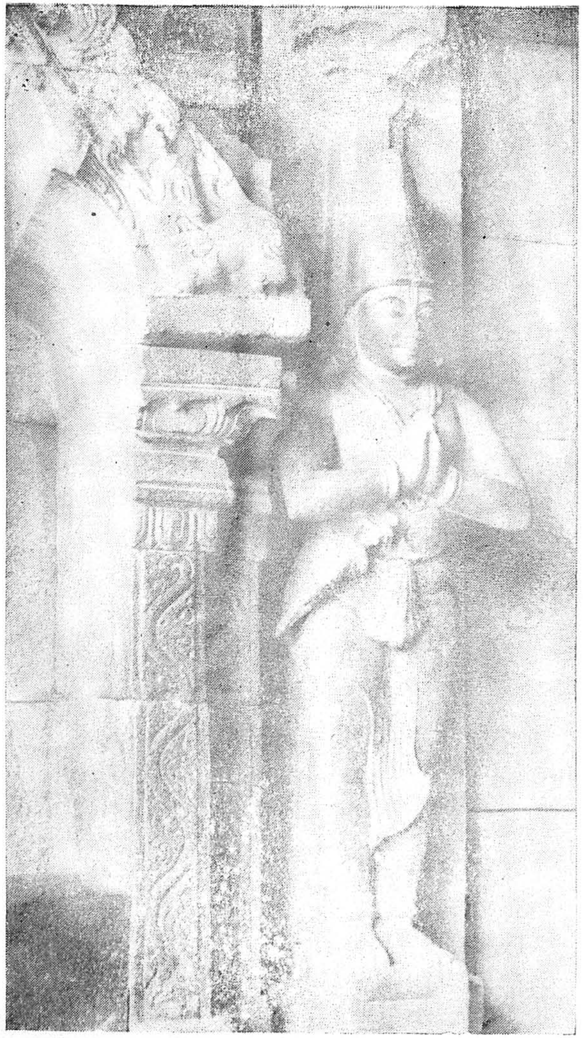
A view of Shepherds' Mandapa from left

Lithic portrait in the Shepherds' Mandapa



Another portrait sculpture in Shepherds' Mandapa

Sculpture in Shepherds' Mandapa - (slightly damaged)

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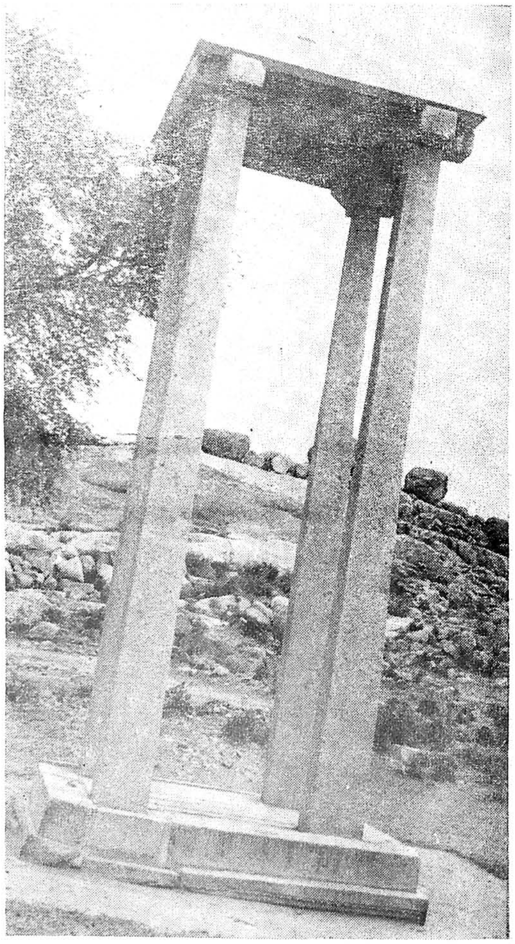
Sculpture in the Shepherds' Mandapa



Dolostava Mandapa

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FOREWORD

The Chennakesava temple in Somapalem village in Madanapalle Taluq, Chittoor District, is an important temple belonging to the Vijayanagara period and school of sculpture and architecture. This temple was first noticed by me in the year 1962 and an article thereon was published highlighting its architectural importance in Andhra Pradesh magazine.

I am happy to see that Sri N. S. Ramaswamy has studied this temple in great detail and brought out a very useful monograph. The illustrations, particularly those of the ceiling paintings and portraits have special value.

I must congratulate Sri Ramaswamy for bringing out this study.

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MADRAS

A MONOGRAPH ON SOMAPALEM TEMPLES

(Chittoor District)

CHAPTER I

The Chennakesava temple in Somapalem, a village in Chittoor district, about twenty-five miles from Madanapalle, is important in two respects. It is one of the most striking of the Vijayanagar temples in Rayalaseema, which contains paintings in the great Lepakshi style. Situated at the foot of a small hill in a barren and bleak countryside, its be-jewelled magnificence stands in contrast to its surroundings.

Over thirty temples are known to have been built in the province, named after the Vijayanagar Rayas, apparently in their time was a green and smiling land, but now ruined by denudation and soil erosion. About twenty of them can be dated to. The earliest, at Atakalagundu, in Kurnool district, was built in 1344 A.D., within a decade of the founding of the empire. The last, the Chennakesava at Chinnavenuturla, in Cuddapah district, was, according to an inscription, renovated in 1690 A.D., in the sad days after Rakshas-Tangadi.

Vijayanagar religious art is florid. This was a response to the ethos of the times. The empire arose to counter a grave threat to the religion and other cherished institutions of the people, and all through its career of some three centuries it had to face this threat. In art, it faced it by creating a world of fantasy in the institution most beloved to it. As the enemy lurked outside the gate, it would call into being a world of religious grandeur and beauty in its temples, wherein it could forget the peril. Hoysala exuberance had been a response to the tender grace of the Karnataka Malnad, but Vijayanagar floridness was an emotional consequence of a mortal peril.

The empire was a beleaguered one. It was the sole bulwark of Hinduism at a time when Islam had conquered much of the rest of the country. From 1336 A.D., when it was founded, through 1565 A.D. when Rakshas-Tangadi enfeebled it, to the seventeenth century when it petered out, it had always to stand guard over. Those who built its temples could not know that these would not be levelled to the ground on the morrow. These temples were a song in the throat of death.

Vijayanagar art took different forms in different provinces of the empire. It was least characteristic in Tamilnad. Though the towering 'gopuras' and the marvellously intricate 'mandapas' are fully in the Vijayanagar mode, the structures are mostly additions to the existing temples, but not independent creations. Very few independent temples were built in this province in the Vijayanagar centuries. Like those the Vittala, near Mamallapuram, which were erected in are small in size and unpretentious in style. The Vijayanagar imprint on the art of Tamilnad is certainly strong, but it is not of the same kind as in Andhra Pradesh or Karnataka.

In Rayalaseema it is truly on its own. In their overflowing piety the Rayas built temples in abundant measure; the temples bursting with sculpture and sometimes with painting, and every turn of the sculptor's chisel and every smack of the mason's trowel devoted to producing poems in stone, not Hoysala lyrics, but grand epics. Lepakshi and Tadpatri in Andhra Pradesh, the Vittala and the Hazara Rama in Karnataka are not only temples but also the real testament of the empire to posterity.

Vijayanagar religious art was a response not only to the longing of the people for beautiful sanctuaries, where they could worship their Gods but also to the land in which it is set. It was a kind of relief from the presentment of nature in which it was created. The contrast between the magnificence of the temples in Hampi and the rocky desolation of their surroundings is remarkable. Lepakshi rears its proud head above another emptiness, and the two temples of Tadpatri seem to have been built in the teeth of nature. It is in another solitude that the Chennakesava temple in Somapalem stands.

This temple is, in some way, uncharacteristic of the idiom to which it belongs. It is small in size and its 'decorativeness' is confined to a part of it. In fact, the art historian who is tired of the cliche that Vijayanagar art is all ornament can show that here it has subordinated sculpture to architecture, that it has realised the effectiveness of 'blank spaces'. The temple's architecture is not swamped by its sculpture. It is an architect's temple, but not a sculptor's as the Venkataramana in Tadpatri is said to be.

In this it is true to the ethos of the countryside in which it stands. Its builders in the sixteenth century chose a capital site, at the foot of a hill, with a vista of rugged grandeur in front of it. Though in a few decades, in Achyuta Raya's reign, the crown and zenith of the florid art of the dynasty would be reached in Lepakshi, though here in Somapalem there is considerable restraint. This temple's makers must have realised that ornateness would accord ill to the nature of the countryside. It is not accidental that it stands in south-west Andhra Pradesh rather than elsewhere in the State.

Though invisible, the potent, influence of past religious art in Chittoor district has been felt. It now becomes necessary to study the history of this region before the Rayas' writ began to run there.

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CHAPTER I

The Somapalem temple contains no inscription. But nobody can doubt for a moment that it was not built in Vijayanagar times. This is strengthened by a number of local traditions which, while differing in details, say unanimously that it was built in the reign of Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1530 A.D.). The art and political history of the region, which may be considered relevant here, begins in the ninth century.

The Banas, feudatories to the Pallavas, were then in power. There were a number of wars among the dynasties of the times. The most important episode in the history of the period was a civil war between the main and the collateral branches of the Western Gangas, the other principal power which disputed the supremacy of the Pallavas. Somapalem might have been the site of one of the battles in this feud. If it was, it can be deduced that it was an important location and that the builders of the temple seven centuries later did not choose it arbitrarily or whimsically, as it might appear today. But the connection with the war is uncertain, almost certainly non-existent.

This war broke out after Sivamara II, the Ganga, died in 812 A.D. after a chequered reign. His eldest son, Marasimha, had passed away while 'yuvaraja', and Marasimha's son, Dindika, better known as Prithvipathi, was very young. The throne passed to Vijayaditya, Sivamara's brother. Vijayaditya died not long after. Prithvipathi had a strong claim to succeed him, but Rajamalla, Vijayaditya's son, occupied the throne. When Prithvipathi came of age, he demanded his right. Rajamalla would not give up the throne. A compromise was reached with a part of the kingdom assigned to Prithvipathi. But it was an uneasy compromise. The cousins fought constant wars.

Prithvipathi's kingdom included Kongu in the south-eastern part of the Ganga territory. The Somapalem region was then a part of Kongu. Many of the battles were fought here. The two rivals enlisted allies. The Bana ruler, Vijayaditya, and the Vaidumbas joined Prithvipathi, while the Nolambas and the Telugu Chodas allied themselves with Rajamalla.

Battles were fought in Mandavu, Madumadurga, Manne, Mangle and Sorimati. The first two sites have been identified with the places in Penukonda taluk of Anantapur district. There is a suggestion that Sorimati (the name also appears as Soramadi and Sorematі) was Somapalem. It is tempting to accept this identification, but the weight of evidence is against it. Sorimati is "identifiable with the modern Colamari in the Penukonda taluk in the Anantapur district", says Dr. T. V. Mahalingam in his 'Banas in South Indian History'. "It lay just at the entrance into the Nolamba kingdom which was under the control of the Ganga Racamalla. Probably its capture was considered strategically important and hence Prithvipati I and his allies concentrated on the capture of the place. The importance of the battle of Soremadi is well indicated by the large number of inscriptions that mention it".

Prithvipathi and his allies won the battle of Sorimati. But it was not a conclusive victory. Not only in the long run were they unable to remove Rajamalla from the Ganga throne but Mahendra I, the Nolamba king, a grandson of Rajamalla, subsequently invaded the Bana country and burnt the towns of Permavi and Koyarrur (the latter is modern Laddigam, where there is a Chola temple, the art of which influenced subsequent temples in parts of Rayalaseema).

When this important, but inconclusive, battle was fought is a problem. The suggested dates are A.D. 825, 826-827, 877-878 and 885, a difference of over half a century. But the controversy has no bearing on the history or ethos of the Somapalem temple. What is important is the fact that, in the indefinable manner of such things, the Ganga temples in the region, like the Chola ones later, were the progenitors, so to say, of the Somapalem fane.

Perumbanappadi, as the region was known in Tamil under the Banas, passed into the hands of the Cholas of Tanjore. It remained under their rule from the reign of Aditya I, the second king of the line his father, Vijayalaya had restored to that of Kulothunga I, from about the last quarter of the ninth century to the beginning of the twelfth, when it was lost to the emerging Hoysalas. Vishnuvardhana, who made the Hoysalas a power, claims to have captured Koyarrur.

Though Aditya I had captured the region about the beginning of the tenth century, the Chola control must have been light and intermittent because of the debacle that took place after the battle of Takkolam in 949 A.D. It was not until Rajaraja I came to the throne that the Cholas recovered. Gangapadi, Nolambapadi and Tadigaipadi were annexed to his kingdom, perhaps early in his reign. The first was renamed 'Rattapadikonda Sola Mandalam' which was governed by the Adigaimans of Tagadur as viceroys.

Hoysala rule over the region was interrupted by a Chola revival. There are Chola inscriptions in the Laddigam temple by the ninth year of Vikrama, Kulothunga I's successor (1118-1135 A.D.). On the whole, however, the Cholas were fighting a losing battle in this area.

The Kakatiyas were in power here for some two centuries, from the middle of the twelfth to their extinction in1323A.D. But it was the Vijayanagar Rayas who were destined to leave a lasting impression on Rayalaseema. The territory appears to have become a part of the empire from the early days. Bukka I one of its founders, himself, seized Penukonda, the most important town in the area, from the Hoysala, Ballala III, and made it his head-quarters. The earliest Vijayanagar epigraph in Anantapur district is dated 1344 A.D., within a decade of the founding of the empire. Under Harihara I Rayalaseema was divided into 'rajyas' or provinces; the Udayagiri rajya comprising the modern Nellore and Cuddapah districts, the Penukonda rajya to its west, and to its

south the Chandragiri and the Muluvayi rajyas. The last was ruled by Kampanna, Bukka's son, at this time.

It was under the Tuluva dynasty that Rayalaseema enjoyed its best days. The great Krishnadevaraya was in no way greater than in the splendour of his benefactions to the temples. The three most famous in Rayalaseema, Tirumala, Kalahasti and Srisailam temples, were granted truly regnal gifts. It was in his reign, as all traditions agree, the Somapalem temple was built.

Like all Hindu dynasties, but more so, the Rayas built temples as though born for it. Ten bare years after the three brothers had founded the empire on the banks of River Tungabhadra, a temple was erected in a Kurnool village, Adakelagunta, for Harihara I's merit. Numerous others followed. Over thirty of them have been identified, and there may be more.

Under the Sangama dynasty till the middle of the fifteenth century arose six dated ones apart from the first, the Mulasthana Mallideva in Atakalagundu of 1346 A.D. They are chronologically the Narasimha in Kadiri, dated five years later; the Vishnu in Gorantla two further years later; the one in Godlavidu of 1362 A.D.; the Ankaladevi in Ganapuram to the consecration of whose Deity there is an epigraphical reference dated 1380 A.D.; the Siva in Mohideenpuram to the renovation of which by a certain Bommi Reddi an inscription dated 1402 A.D. refers; and the Varadaraja in Pedda Velagaturu of 1405 A. D.

Under the Tuluva dynasty eight temples were built; five in Krishnadeva Raya's reign and the rest in that of his successor, Achyutha Raya. The former are the Chennakesava in Dombara-Nandyala, the Vedanarayana in Nagalapuram, the Siva in Upparapalle, the Virabhadra in Nagaluti and the Chennakesava in Chinna Chappalle. The latter are the Vishnu in Chemullappalle, Mangapuram and Narayanavanam. Even after Rakshas-Tangadi three fanes were erected; the Vishnupuram in Srirangapuram and the Chennakesava in Sidhhvattam and Chinnavenuturla.

Twelve other temples are undated, among those of Somapalem. Of the other there are two in Penukonda, three in Chandragiri, and one each in Markapuram, Pushpagiri, Rayachoti, Tadpatri, Lepakshi and the Siva temple at the foot of Srisailam hill.

Like much of the rest of southern India the region fell on evil days after the Vijayanagar power disappeared. The Nawabs of Cuddapah became its overlords, about 1714 A.D. Forty-three years later a Mahratta army under Balwant Rao attacked Cuddapah. It is said to have been bought off by the surrender of the fort in Gurramkonda, sixteen miles east of Somapalem. The fort was lost to Hyder Ali who placed Mir Sahib, his brother-in-law in charge of it. This was in 1766 A.D. Still

later, in 1780 A.D. the region came under the rule of Mir Raja Ali Khan (whose tomb is in Gurramkonda).

There was virtual anarchy in the region during these times. Number of polegars, or local chieftains, claimed suzerainty and they went to war among themselves as they pleased, carrying fire and sword. It was not until after 1800 A.D. that Major, later Sir Thomas Munro was able to restore order.

Munro was appointed Collector of the Ceded Districts, so described because the Nizam had ceded them to the British to pay the cost of the maintenance of the Subsidiary Force at Hyderabad. Apart from the Nizam's troops there were thirty thousand armed retainers of some eighty polegars, who subsisted by 'rapine'. There were also "bands of robbers" who "wandered through the open country, plundering and putting to death travellers who refused to submit to their exactions". Besides, nature proved inimical. In 1802-03 A.D. there was drought and famine, and in the following year excessive rains. It took a long time for the land to recover.

CHAPTER II

Since the temple contains no foundation inscription, it must be dated on the basis of its style. Popular tradition, as recorded in later times, helps. The style indisputably proclaims the first half of the sixteenth century. Tradition suggests the reign of Krishnadeva Raya, lasted from 1509 to 1530 A.D. He was succeeded by Achyutha Raya, in whose reign Lepakshi was built.

Four traditions are preserved. According to one, which is explicit, Krishnadeva Raya granted five villages, Somapalem being one among them, to two local chieftains, Basi or Kasini Nayudu and Mullappa Nayudu, who were brothers. It is said that it was the former who built the temple.

The second tradition, while agreeing that the temple was built in Vijayanagar times, ascribes the erection to a shepherd, living in the neighbourhood of Somapalem. He is said to have suddenly become rich by acquiring hidden treasure. He secured chieftainship over the region from the Rayas. He built a fort and the Chennakesava temple. His name is given as Krishnappa or Chinanna.

But, according to the third tradition, while the village of Somapalem came into being in Krishnadeva Raya's reign, the temple was built later. Some cowherds, it is said, erected a fort at the base of a rocky hill to enclose and protect a village. But they were obliged to flee the place because of oppression. Later, two brothers, Basi or Kasini Nayudu and Mullappa Nayudu obtained five villages from the Rayas. It was Kasini Nayudu who built the temple. The descendants of the brothers are said to have ruled the region for many centuries.

The fourth tradition, the most elaborate of them, is preserved in the Archaeological Survey of India's annual report for 1902-03. It states, "The tradition as to the origin of the village which survives locally is closely connected with the Polegar family whose descendants still occupy the place. It relates that during the reign of King Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagar (A.D. 1509-30) some cowherds who dwelt in the neighbouring jungles erected a fort in order to enclose and protect the village, but owing to oppression the cowherds were compelled to flee the place, leaving everything in charge of two brothers named Basi Nayudu and Mullappa Nayudu. The descendants of these named Sivi, Pedda Viramallappa, Muttumallappa and Kumaramallappa continued the line of ruling Zamindars and in course of time cleared the surrounding forest, constructed temples and a fort on the Kondamma hill, dug tanks, and laid out gardens. They in fact established their capital there and the villages of Gundlapalle,

Gudupalle, Chandasamudram, Gangareddupalle, Diguvampalayam, Kotapalle, Mulakalcheruvu and Vedasiri became outlying suburbs. The family continued to reign for a span of years and the rulers devoted themselves as far as the times would allow to the well being of their subjects".

The third tradition seems to be only a variant of the fourth and in fact, based on it. According to two of these popular beliefs, Kasini Nayudu built the temple. A third gives his name as Krishnappa or Chinanna, but the fourth ascribes the temple to a descendant of his (the many that Sivi, Pedda Viramallappa, Muttumallappa and Kumaramallappa are said to have built including the Somapalem fane).

The versions also differ on the time, when the temple could have been built; in Krishnadeva Raya's reign according to one and later according to the other. Three are agreed that the village arose in that reign.

Traditions of this type are useful only to a limited extent. They provide some approximations. To the extent that they say that the temple was built in Vijayanagar times, they are useful. For, they corroborate the evidence of style. As for the builder, there seems to be no justification for looking beyond Kasini Nayudu.

Modern readers may be surprised to learn that the shepherds were able to build temples and erect villages in the sixteenth century. But the 'kafiyats' preserved in the Mackenzie Manuscripts suggest that this was common enough. Thus, the 'kafiyat' of Konduru states that the village was "originally founded by a shepherd on a spot where he discovered an image of goddess Candesvari, also known as Konduramma". According to another 'kafiyat', the village of Alucakonda was "originally founded by a few shepherds".

It was customary for kings to bestow forest lands on their subordinates as 'jagirs'. These cleared them to found villages and build temples. A number of these temples were dedicated to Chennakesava. A typical 'kafiyat' states that the village of Prattikonda "became the jagir of one Konetiraju, who was serving under the Vijayanagar kings as a subordinate. After many generations one Venkataraju became the Jagirdar and he saw the possibility of constructing a fort on the high level of the village. He accordingly constructed a fort; and another village around the fort sprang up".

There can be little doubt that it was somewhat in this manner the village of Somapalem sprang up in Vijayanagar days. The temple must have followed as a matter of course. It is not improbable that the hamlet of Somapalle, which stands on the main road from Madanapalle to the site of the temple at the foot of a hill, existed before Somapalem arose in Vijayanagar times around the temple. In Somapalle itself there is a temple of Choudeswari.

Sewell, in his topographical list of antiquities in the old Madras Presidency published in 1882, mentions three inscriptions in this "old sculptured Vishnu temple",

on the flagstaff, on the wall of a room and on the pillar of a mandapam. The first is said to be "illegible" and the rest "private". Sewell calls the village "Somapalle".

Sewell mentions three epigraphs in the neighbourhood, "in a field east of Patakota village", "near a tamarind tope south of the hamlet of Bissanavaripalle" and "at the temple of Choudesvara". He adds that "one and a half miles east of the village is the fort of Kasimkota, said to be 800 years old".

The first of these inscriptions, a damaged one, has been engraved on a rock. It is in Telugu language. It seems to record the gift of "sarvamanya" land under the order of the king and under the direction of (Rama) Raya. It mentions "Penugondasima". It is dated Saka 1480, Kalayukti, Sravana ba. I, equivalent to July 31, 1558 A.D. Sadasiva was the nominal Raya at the time.

The third inscription, occurring in the temple of Choudesvari, is dated Saka 1480, Kalayukti, Magha ba. 14, Sivaratri, equivalent to January 6, 1559 A.D. It records a grant of money for the worship of Goddess Kota Chavundeswaramma of Somapalle by Mahamandalesvara Jillela Krishnamaraja Vengalaraja in the reign of Virapratapa Sadasivadeva Maharaya.

All that these inscriptions indicate is that the two neighbouring villages were of some account in Sadasiva Raya's reign. Perhaps the indirect inference that may be drawn from is that the Chennakesava temple must have been built before this period. Since there is nothing that refers to the two villages and the two temples to any period earlier than Krishnadeva Raya's reign, it is reasonable to hold that the Chennakesava temple must have been built in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

There is a tradition that the architect of the temple was Dankanacharya, who also built the Lepakshi and the Jalakanteswara temple in Vellore. It is of little historical value.

The temple's history after the fall of Vijayanagar power was chequered. According to the report of the Archaelogical Survey for 1902-03, already quoted from, "it is stated that there are records to show that during times of the Mahrattas and Mughals (Muslims), the local rulers paid Rs. 5000 Kundani and an additional sum of Rs. 1201 as 'peishkist'. They celebrated the daily 'utsavams' at the temple and built mandapams. Under the orders of the Mahratta Tahsildars, Madhava Rao, Mahipathi Rao, Krishnayya and Baji Raghunatha Namanath, they strengthened the walls of the fort and from it governed the surrounding country".

The report adds that when the Muslims "conquered this part of the country in the cyclic year Hevilambi the inhabitants of Sompalle were driven out by Mir Sahib, and the temple was partly destroyed. Evidences of this are at present seen in the headless and limbless images still in the temple". The year referred to was 1777 A.D.

But "in the cyclic year Sadharana the Polegar Zamindar, Kumara Mallappa, again entered Sompalle and daily puja at the temple was resumed". This was in 1790 A.D.

The report further records, "There are said to be accounts in the Vayalpad taluk to the effect that the Utsavam of the temple was celebrated partly by subscriptions raised by the ryots and partly by donations from the Government. In the year 1210 Fasli, Colonel Munro gave a 'patta' to Mallappa Nayudu to the effect that Izara had been given for Rs. 2120".

Regular worship seems to have been continued until 1953 A.D. That year there was a severe famine in the region, and it was suspended. Moreover, robbers, hoping to find treasure under the main image, removed it to another part of the temple, and dug in the sanctum. They found no treasure. Today worship of a sort continues.

At the beginning of the twentieth century some repairs were carried out. The Archaeological Survey's report of 1902-03 states, "Several portions of the temple were, a few years back, in a partly ruined state, but they are all now thoroughly repaired at the instance of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon".

CHAPTER III

The Chennakesava temple faces east. Not too far off there is an elevated ground in the form of a hill in a kind of semicircle. At the border of the lower ground in which the temple is located there are small carved stone pillars on one side and a dilapidated shrine on the other. To the east of these there are the remains of a small fort. In the fields to the right of the temple there are survivals of a few shrines. The builder of the temple selected a site impressive from nature.

On plan the temple has a fine clarity. One enters it through a 'gopura' set in the middle of the eastern wall. The lower parts of the 'gopura' are of stone, and the tower of brick. Only two 'talas' of the tower have survived and that too only in the eastern part.

Directly in front of the entrance there is a small stone shrine, built in the form of a 'ratha' with four wheels, at the eastern entrance to the 'mahamandapa', the hall in front of the 'mukhamandapa', which adjoins the 'antarala' and the sanctum. Nearby is the 'balipitha'.

This 'ratha' is not so striking as that in Tadpatri and is very much smaller than the celebrated one in Hampi. Its lower part is of granite and the upper of finely carved black stone. The shrine is of the 'Nagara' order. The "sikhara" contains images on its four sides.

The 'mahamandapa' contains fourteen pillars. Twelve of these are disposed in three rows of four each. There are two more, in the south-western and north-western corners. Some of these columns have a projecting pillaret, some others three, and still some others a 'yali' bracket. But all the capitals are in the characteristic Vijayanagar mode. Some divine sculptures are carved on the pillars. The roof of the "mandapa" contains a row of brick arches on its edge.

The ceiling of the 'mandapa' is of flat stone slabs covered with plaster. The celebrated paintings appear here. According to the Archaeological Survey's report of 1903-04, "the roof formerly leaked and in consequence these paintings have been much injured, but the leakage has now been stopped". Even so, very little of the paintings can be seen today, the best in the south-west corner, and only traces in the other parts. A label in Telugu has survived, "Raghupathi ara——". The plaster on which the murals occur is exceptionally deep.

The 'mukhamandapa' to which the 'mahamandapa' leads is a smaller rectangle. In its centre there are four pillars, with corresponding pilasters on the walls. The pillars belong to the Vijayanagar idiom. The ceiling above the four pillars has a carving of a lotus in the centre.

On either side of the entrance to the 'antarala' there is a platform containing a pillar. There are 'dvarapalakas' on either side of the entrance to the 'antarala'. The sanctum contains a fine standing image of Lord Vishnu. Its 'vimana' has two storeys. The 'sikhara' is circular. There are no 'stupis'.

To the left of the Lord's shrine and not, as is customary in Vaishnava temples, to its right stands the Thayar shrine. It consists of a 'mukhamandapa', an 'antarala' and the sanctum. It is a plain square structure. It has no 'vimana', but only a flat roof.

Very different in style is the 'kalyana mandapa' to the right of the Lord's shrine. It is the one structure characteristically Vijayanagar in this temple. Similar 'mandapas' in many other Vijayanagar fanes are remarkable essays in exuberant adornment, like those in the Sri Varada temple in Kanchipuram and in the Jalakantes-wara temple in Vellore. The Somapalem 'mandapa' is not so extensive as those two, but in its little compass it contains a wealth of decoration.

The structure is in two parts, the front and the back. The front contains eleven pillars, disposed in three rows. One in the back row is missing. In the centre of the back part there is a beautiful pavilion. There are also twelve pillars here. They contain superb reliefs.

The 'adishthana' of the pavilion is exquisitely carved. There are animal and floral sculptures. Above the 'adisthana' four pillars stand at each corner to make the pavilion. Though these columns are comparatively small, they contain delightful reliefs, divine, human and animal. There is a raised platform in the middle of the pavilion. The ceiling contains rich floral designs and dancing poses. The 'vimana' is in two storeys, with a square 'sikhara' and no 'stupa'.

There are nine small shrines on the four outer walls of the temple. There are two empty ones to the right of the 'gopura' adjoining the eastern wall and three on the southern. They are all simple structures, containing only the sancta.

A little more ornate are the three on the western wall. Scrolls have been carved on the jambs of the entrance to the first of these, and there is Gajalakshmi on the lintel. The next shrine contains an image of Lakshminarayana. The third has well-carved door jambs.

The ninth shrine, located in the north-eastern corner of the 'prakara' consists of the sanctum and a small 'mandapa' in front. There is no image in the sanctum.

On a wall there is a Telugu inscription, some what illegible, carrying the date of the cyclic year, 'Vijayasamvastaram' and stating that Krishnama Nayudu made a grant to the temple.

Outside the 'prakara' walls there are interesting structures to the left and straight ahead. The "dhvajastambha", which stands some twenty-five feet away and directly in line with the entrance, is quite a feature of this temple. It is 52½ feet high from ground to summit and may be even taller, since the base extends deep into the soil to ensure stability. It is located on a high square platform, which is richly, though minutely, carved with dancing figures and lotus petal designs. Two Telugu words, "Vijaya samvatsaram", are carved here.

Immediately above the pedestal occurs the base daintily sculptured on four sides. Figures appear in 'toranas' the top portions of which carry floral designs. On the west face, facing the temple is a standing figure of Garuda in the posture of worship. The north face contains the figures of a man holding a 'vina' in his right hand, while on the east appears the relief possibly of an entertainer of some kind, and on the south that of a woman waving a fly-whisk.

Immediately above these four reliefs commence a scroll which winds upwards on all the four sides. It begins near four other carvings; two men and two women alternating. On the east and west faces two men riding lions; on the north and south are two women, one standing on a 'makara' and the other riding a lion.

From above these figures ascends a convolvulus creeper with a heavy centre. At the top there is a square capital, which had iron rings at each of the four corners, to which chains or ropes were attached in order to draw up lamps. Above this capital there is a 'kuta' made of brick. The entire column, whitish in colour, is a monolith.

It is impossible to exaggerate the artistic effectiveness of this gigantic column. Set as it is against a bleak background of hill, it looks like a dainty ornament which has unaccountably strayed from Lepakshi or Tadpatri.

There is another interesting structure to the left of the 'gopura'. This is a 'mandapa' to which the Archaeological Survey's report of 1902-03 gives the name of 'Golladana' or 'Peddanayana'. It is called the 'shepherds' mandapam' in "commemoration of the part played by these people in the foundation of the place". It was used as a resting place for the divine images when taken out from temple on festivals. There is a raised platform for the purpose.

The 'mandapa' has been built abutting the eastern 'prakara' wall. Closed on the north and south, it is open on the east. There are two pillars at the entrance. They contain large sculptures of women, as it were offering a welcome to visitors. In the interior there are ten more columns. To five of these are attached large

impressive effigies of royal, or at least baronial, personages. These figures make an interesting study.

They have many common features. These are the tall cylindrical crowns or headgear, of the type familiar from the bronzes of the Vijayanagar emperors in the Tirumala temple; the hands held in the 'anjali' pose; the sheathed daggers at the waist; and the stylised 'dhoti' ending in a fold near the ankle. There can be little doubt that the personages represented were men of eminence in the State in their time. Each is a portrait. The noses of two of them have been damaged. Even so, it is easy to realise that here are five magnates of the empire. Perhaps one of them is Kasini Nayudu, who built the temple. The anonymity is tantalising.

In the centre of the 'mandapa' stands the pavilion where the divine images were placed. Its 'adisthana' is minutely carved, and the pillars at the four corners are typically Vijayanagar in style. On the ceiling there is a lotus carving.

There was another 'mandapa' in front of this one, but it is quite ruined. Nothing of it survives today except some standing pillars and a few which have fallen down. According to the old report of the Archaeological Survey, these columns "have worshipping images attached". These are not to be found today.

To the south of this 'mandapa' there stands the 'dolotsava mandapa', where the divine images were placed in a swing during festivals. It is a tall structure with four pillars of plain design. In the centre of the high roof there are devices which held the swing.

According to the Archaeological Survey's report, there was to the east of the 'dhvajastambha' a "mound raised by a former official who proposed to lower and remove the pillar, but fortunately the intention was not carried out".

CHAPTER IV

Dr. James Cousins wrote in a note on the Somapalem temple in 1937, "It is on the verandah in front of the door to the shrine (where 'puja' is performed once a week) that the eye is caught by patches of colour on the ceiling, once a series of paintings on plaster over the granite ceiling-slabs. The paintings are in a lamentable state of decay. But the fragments of fine colouring, the character shown in groups and the individuals either in repose or vigorous action, the costuming, the glimpse of structures and equipages, all cry out for protection against individuals who scrawl their names over these paintings. They appear to be based on incidents from the Ramayana.... A study of them will add important data on the history of mural art in South India".

If the paintings were in a "lamentable state of decay" in 1937, it is clear that the repairs to the temple to which the Archaeological Survey's report of 1903-04 refers were not very effective. Today the survivals are scanty, a very small part of the wealth that must once have covered the entire ceiling of the 'mukhamandapa'. In this they resemble the paintings in the Venkataramana temple in Tadpatri, where, in fact, the survivals are even scantier.

That Tadpatri temple was, as I have suggested (rather than asserted) in my monograph on it in this series ("Archaeological Series, No. 45"), built in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, probably when Vira Narasimha, Krishnadeva Raya's father, was the Raya. If the suggestion is well founded, Somapalem must have been erected within about two decades. Since no paintings have survived today in the other Rayalaseema temples built in Krishnadeva Raya's reign (those in the Vedanarayana temple in Nagalapuram were destroyed by whitewash about 1975), the Somapalem murals must be considered the next essay in the art after Tadpatri, which culminated in the sublime grandeur of the Lepakshi, created in the reign of Achyutha Raya, Krishnadeva's successor. These three temples, the Venkataramana in Tadpatri, the Somapalem, and the Lepakshi, were built in successive reigns. This fact enables the student to study the development of the Vijayanagar mural art.

Though very little painting is left in the Tadpatri temple, there is enough to help in the study. The survivals consist of a big panel of Lord Vishnu and his two Consorts, with two attendants carrying fly-whisks, a representation of a sage, and three rows of scenes separated by bands. Though there is a tradition that the paintings were added to the temple by Yeratima, a local governor under Aliya Rama Raya, the virtual successor of Achyutha Raya, there is nothing in their style to indicate that they are posterior to Lepakshi rather than anterior.

The 'Ramayana' has served south Indian mural art far less than the 'Mahabharata' and the 'Bhagavatha'. In Andhra Pradesh there are temple murals based on that epic only in Somapalem and Lepakshi. Miniature painting which, as a form, has influenced the Somapalem murals to some extent was concerned more with Sri Krishna than with Sri Rama. Even in their faded state the Somapalem paintings are, thus, of special value.

The Somapalem paintings are "closer in style to Lepakshi" than the other Vijayanagar survivals. Therefore, to understand Somapalem it is necessary to understand Lepakshi with some prefigurines, as it were, from Tadpatri.

The Lepakshi style is "mostly descriptive and, where it is not, it is decorative, and rendered completely in flat pattern suggesting only a single plane, with the artist never attempting to suggest depth either by chiaroscuro or by rendering the composition in multiple planes. The design is entirely by line, even the details which are mainly decorative are suggested only in appropriate lines so that the entire painting presents an appearance of coloured drawings and rather free painting. But it is full of verve, vitality and filled with intense human drama in which gods, angels and all other beings of creation participate and the subject presented takes away the spectator into a state of complete absorption".

Human beings are presented mostly in full or three-quarters profile. But the deities appear in full front view. The jewellery and the clothes they all wear form a riot of spectacle. Animals are represented conventionally, and little attention is paid to the background. All panels have borders of textile designs. Lepakshi, of course, is a great store-house of such designs, and many, both in the paintings and on the pillars, are frequently copied.

Lepakshi's artistic rewards are many. Among the technical, or professional, one is the ease with which the painters suggest movement in tune with the incident portrayed; it is calm and reposeful in statuesque scenes, but speedy, even violent, in those which demand rapid movement. In a general sense Lepakshi presents a panorama of the mediaeval Hindu world, which could distract attention from the world of danger and strife outside.

A study of the Somapalem murals shows that many of the Lepakshi characteristics are prefigured here. It is a story which they illustrate, the story of the 'Ramayana'. Among the episodes which can be identified are Rama bending Siva's great bow in Janaka's court, Rama slaying Tataka, Dasaratha attempting to appease Kaikeyi, and Rama bidding farewell to Dasaratha. These incidents have been portrayed in the authentic Lepakshi mode. Panels separate the incidents, the human figures are typically Lepakshi, shown in full or part profile, the divine personalities appear in full view, the coiffeurs, clothes and jewellery are like those found in the ater murals. But it is not possible to admire the depiction of movement because the

compass is limited. Even when freshly painted, these murals were very small in quantity compared to the vast extent in Lepakshi.

There is a big painting of Lord Vishnu in Tadpatri and a huge one of Lord Virabhadra in the Lepakshi. There is no image of this size in the Somapalem temple, which is much smaller than its predecessor and its successor. The Somapalem art is essentially the art of the mural miniaturist.

The colours mostly in use in Somapalem are dark brown, orange, light blue and dark and light yellow. In 1937 Dr. Cousins could write of "dark patches of colour". Today they are all faded. The conservationist has done his best, but his has been a difficult task. It is sheer melancholy to think that what must once have been a glorious panorama of the 'Ramayana' story has now shrunk to a few patches here and there.

The architecture of the temple appears in a better light than in many other Vijayanagar fanes, which are swamped by their sculpture. There is nothing here of the almost febrile exuberance of some of the Hampi temples, which are the more striking for the contrast with the rocky desolation outside. It is an interesting fact that at least in two Rayalaseema Vijayanagar temples only one structure has been selected to ornament in the fashion so common almost in every other part in the fanes of the dynasty elsewhere. In the Ramalinga temple in Tadpatri, the 'mukhamandapa' of the Devi shrine is jewelled architecture. Here, in the Somapalem temple, it is the 'kalyana mandapa'.

For the rest, architecture gains supremacy over sculpture. Most of the pillars are nothing exceptional in their art. Most of the structures are bare and unadorned. Even the "shepherd's mandapa" has little ornamentation apart from the portraits. The great monolith has restrained "decoration"; it impresses by its height.

The sculpture finds free expression in the 'kalyana mandapa' and nowhere else in the temple. But there it is fully itself. The portrait sculptures form an interesting prelude to the imperial bronzes in the Tirumala temple.

The Somapalem temple may be said to mark an intermediate stage in the development of Vijayanagar art in Rayalaseema from Tadpatri to its culmination in Lepakshi.

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